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# **U.S. Humanitarian Demining Support to Vietnam**

**By**

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A five-man delegation of Vietnamese humanitarian demining experts recently toured the U.S. to gain an appreciation of the American view of humanitarian demining concepts and operations. The visit, sponsored by the U.S. Department of State, included meetings with top officials in the State Department and the Department of Defense, and was highlighted by visits to training sites, corporations involved in mine action, and the Defense Security Cooperation Agency (DSCA–sponsored Mine Action Information Center (MAIC) at James Madison University.

The visit came just months after the United States and Vietnam signed a historic bilateral agreement that will allow the Vietnamese to receive modern demining equipment and other mine-related assistance through the U.S. humanitarian demining program. The Vietnamese will receive \$1.75 million worth of demining gear under the June 2000 agreement to aid in the removal of the estimated 3.5 million mines, as well as vast amounts of unexploded ordnance which is contaminating its countryside and snarling its infrastructure.

The State Department also plans to provide \$1.4 million conduct a “Level One” impact survey which will help the Vietnamese to prioritize those areas which pose the greatest immediate threat to civilians, arable land, and infrastructure. The DoD will target \$200K for technical mapping of those selected sites, and \$80K for mine awareness education and land mine database support.

After visiting the U.S. Army’s Humanitarian Demining Research and Development Center in Fort Belvoir, and the leading U.S. demining organizations in and around Washington D.C., the delegation made its way to James Madison University (JMU) for briefings organized by the Mine Action Information Center. James Madison University and DSCA officials briefed the Vietnamese on demining information management and provided results of a mine awareness campaign which the MAIC had conducted in Vietnam.

Even though the Vietnamese defense officials were concerned primarily with mine clearance activities, they showed special interest in the MAIC’s efforts to educate the local populace in Quang Tri Province (site of the former DMZ) in ways to spot and avoid mined areas. The delegation, led by Vietnamese Deputy Commander of the Ministry of National Defense, Truong Quang Khanh, was addressed by JMU professors Anne Stewart and Terry Wessel, who ran the mine awareness program from October 1998 to March 2000. The DSCA representative, Tom Smith, outlined the program management role his office will play in shaping the emerging U.S.–Vietnamese land mine project. At the conclusion of the visit to the MAIC, a State Department humanitarian demining officer, remarked, “The visit to JMU was great. It shows that we [the U.S.] can do more than just provide equipment and gear to the Vietnamese mine action effort.”

Following its tour of the MAIC at JMU, the delegation visited mine action-related facilities at the Global Training Academy in Somerset, Texas, the Humanitarian Demining Training Center

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at Ft. Leonard Wood, Mo., and the U.S. Pacific Command (PACOM) and Asia-Pacific Network in Hawaii.

### **About the Author**

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